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Christie Appelhanz, Executive Director
Children's Alliance of Kansas
Neutral Testimony on Senate Bill 312
Before the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Chairwoman Schmidt and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on Senate Bill 312. The Children's Alliance represents 17 private, nonprofit member agencies that coordinate child welfare activities and programming across Kansas to strengthen families. We believe every Kansan deserves accessible, regular, high-quality oral health care, including the more than 7,000 children currently in state custody.

Children in state custody lack access to dental care.

Our members help ensure children in state custody receive appropriate dental care in the face of significant challenges. Children in foster care are served through KanCare, but few dentists accept Medicaid. In addition to the lack of providers for youth in care, we have seen older youth aging out of care who are unable to access timely dental care not only for prevention, but treatment for pain. Absent dental care for pain, some Kansas youth resort to substance use for self-medicating.

SB 312 is a small step in the right direction.

While we do not believe SB 312 goes far enough, we support any efforts to expand the capacity of our state to provide dental care. We are concerned, however, that only allowing certain procedures – including drilling and filling cavities – to be performed under the direct supervision of a dentist will not meet the needs of children in care. If dental therapists cannot practice without directly involving a dentist while they are delivering needed care, they cannot significantly improve patients' access to care.

Let's continue the conversation about how to address Kansas' dental care shortage.

Children's Alliance appreciates lawmakers' willingness to consider this issue and the opportunity to highlight the dental care needs of children in state custody. We will continue to work so supervising dentists can choose to allow dental therapists to one day shift to general supervision.